

Testimony of Tom "Smitty" Smith

Public Citizen Texas' Office

On the Sunset of Texas Railroad Commission

August 22nd 2016

Today you will hear from dozens of citizens from across the state who have journeyed here to ask you to support and toughen the Sunset Commission's suggested reforms of Rail Road Commission.

Today you will hear from citizens that they support the recommendations to:

- Increase inspections
- Toughen enforcement and assure the penalties exceed the profits made by scofflaws
- To do a better job of inspecting pipelines
- Increase transparency
- Transfer hearings to SOAH and rate cases to the PUC
- Toughen bonding requirements for unplugged wells

You will hear from citizens who want to raise new issues

- Tougher limits on campaign contributions
- Toughening bonding requirements for mining reclamation to assure that Texas isn't left holding the bag as coal plants and mining companies go bankrupt

You will hear from scientists who have studied the impact of:

- fracking and flaring on health
- the impact on downwind communities like San Antonio who have fallen into non-attainment as a result of emissions from flaring and other fracking related emissions
- impact of waste disposal on our drinking water supplies

Your will hear from citizens who:

- Have been sickened by out of control emissions from fracking and flaring
- Have been sickened by water pollution
- Have been sickened by poor waste disposal processes
- Whose home have been damaged by earthquakes caused by fracking wastes injected underground
- Residents of an entire neighborhood poisoned by unplugged wells
- You will hear data on the vast amount of money “donated” to the RRC commissioners and why campaign finance reforms needs to be added to the issues debated by the legislature –
- You will hear why Texas law needs to be toughened to assure that Texas coal mines are reclaimed – and that we don’t get stuck with hundreds of millions of dollars in cost to resort mined lands
- You will hear from a community leader who has recently hosted a citizen hearing in the DFW area- who will summarize the concerns of those who showed up their but who could not testify here today
- You will hear about a study that that compared Texas laws and policies to that of 8 other state and found that we lag behind many of them in protecting our citizens from air and water pollution, enforcement, transparency, and accountability. Many of these states are big oil and gas producers- whose industry is thriving with tougher laws.

The key theme is that the RRC doesn’t do a good enough job to protect the people, our air and our water but does a great job in protecting the profits of the oil and gas industry.

We are asking you as elected leaders, as the trustees for our air and water and our democracy, to adopt the Sunset Commission’s recommendations, to expand them and to toughen them. After 30 years of observation I can tell you without your leadership and intervention the Railroad Commission is unlikely to act.